

Islam and the Nigerian Question: A Historical Glimpse

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Abstract

Since the 11th century AD when Islam made its debut into the area known today as Nigeria, it has enjoyed copious attention and literature from Islamic scholars, academic and other freelance commentators. Islam, which was initially considered to be a religion of the courts, has left a trail of influence on those courts (and their subjects) that came in contact with it. In the pre-colonial days, Islam played a formidable role in integrating its adherents and also introducing institutions of governance such as the judiciary and bureaucracy in the emirates and states. The attempt to widen the scope of its adherence, practice and influence through both the jihads of the words and the swords appears to negate the role earlier ascribed to it. The zeal to expand the frontiers and still sustain its purity has turned Islam into a threat to the Nigerian project. This paper attempts to interrogate the changing role of Islam from being a factor of integration and development to that of disintegration and draw-back on Nigeria's march to nationhood. This paper argues that this paradigm shift is antithetical to the secularity and survival of the Nigerian nation-state.

INTRODUCTION

Religious crises are attaining a disintegrative level in Nigeria in recent years thereby occupying a centre-stage in the Nigerian Question discourse. Right from 1804 when Uthman Dan Fodio carried out his revivalist jihad in Northern Nigeria, adherents of Islam have imbibed the culture of violence in the propagation and defence of Islam. The preference for the jihad of the sword to that of the word (persuasion) has constituted a disturbing challenge to the unity and indivisibility of Nigeria. Since the last three decades, Islam has thrown up fundamentalists and fanatics who seem greatly determined to pull down the web of the Nigerian society. The vicious activities of the Boko Haram

insurgents in the Northern part of Nigeria are not only traumatic but also at variance with the efforts made by the patriotic citizens in nation building. Experiences tend to show that Islam has not engendered religious tolerance, inter-ethnic harmony and national integration. Rather than address the Nigerian Question, Islam has, instead, exacerbated it. It has therefore become part of the problem rather than being part of the solution.

The role of Islam in nation building has not enjoyed robust and unstinted scholarly attention in spite of the horror, mayhem and destabilizing terrorism unleashed by some of its adherents on the Nigerian nation and her citizenry. This has created a gap in the comprehensive history of Islam in Nigeria. This study hopes to fill the gap in the existing literature by highlighting how some utterances, actions and activities of some extremists have clogged the drive towards building a virile and indivisible Nigerian

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nation. The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. The next section contextualises the concepts of Islam and the Nigerian question. This is followed by section two which highlights the early beginning of Islam in Nigeria while the next section presents Islam and the Nigerian project under colonial rule. Islam in the post-colonial Nigeria takes the next stage followed by section seven which deals with Islam under the Fourth Republic. The final section concludes with a summary of the salient points and discussion of the limitations of the work.

Concepts of Islam and Nigerian Question

It may be worthwhile to attempt to clarify the concepts so as to establish a firm grasp of the discourse. Islam, in the context of the Koran- the embodiment of the word of Allah, means “absolute submission or resignation to the will of Allah”¹. I.R.A Ozigboh believes that Islam etymologically derives from the Arabic word “Salam or Salama, which means peace, surrender, submission”² to the will of God (Allah). H. Abdalati appears to share in this view when he says that “the words ‘Islam’ and ‘peace’ are synonymous because they were derived from the same root”³. It needs to be mentioned that the Koran is not just a collection of Allah’s will but “also contains political ideas which are used to establish relationship in a political system based on Islamic beliefs”⁴. This goes to show that Islam is much more than the relationship between man and his Creator. As Y.A. Quadri puts it, “it is a religion that spurs its adherents to progress and make positive actions”⁵. It is, perhaps, the pursuit of this injunction that brings to the fore the nexus or interface between Islam and the Nigerian Question.

Nigerian Question

Nigerian Question or National Question, like many other concepts, is a complex phenomenon. In consequence, it has come to be defined variously across time and space. According to J.F. Ade Ajayi, for

instance, it has to do with “the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings; it also entails rights and privileges, access to power and equitable share of national resources”⁶. Similarly, Eskor Toyo defines the concept as “the association of ethnic groups or nations in a political union or the unity, integrity, autonomy or viability of states”⁷.

As can be seen in this paper, the various epochs of Nigeria’s political history determine the context and content of the national question. During the colonial era, for instance, it had to do with the activities of the nationalists in the de-colonization processes. In the post-colonial period, it is all the antagonistic struggles between religious groups, ethnic interests and other socio-political concerns that tend to sever and or hinder the attainment of a common nationhood. These definitions, when juxtaposed with the activities of Muslims in modern day Nigeria, would establish whether or not Islam has not overreached itself in its claim of peace, a *sine qua non* for nation building.

The Early Days of Islam in Nigeria

The entry point of Islam into Nigeria is generally believed to be the Kanem Borno Empire. Following the emergence of the Hausa states of Kano, Katsina, Gobir and Zaria to the West of Borno, there also developed increased commercial activities attracting itinerant Muslim traders who were as well “‘missionaries’ in their own rights. As has been argued by J.S. Trimingham, “Islam was introduced into Kanem from the North and into the Hausa states from Western Sudan”⁸. J.O. Hunwick supports this line of argument when he says that “in Hausaland Islam is said to have been first introduced in the second half of the fourteenth century by Wangarawa merchants though it seemed likely that something of Islam would have been known before this through contacts with

Bornu whose tradition of Islam goes back some three centuries prior to this”⁹.

It is plausible to state that at the initial stage, Islam remained essentially, a religion of traders that excited just a few other persons. On the strength of this, it can be said that Islam owed its spread in Northern Nigeria as elsewhere in the world to the activities of traders. Writing on the long march of Islam in Western Sudan, N. Levtzion contends that “in Africa, traders rather than warriors have been Islam’s principal agents”¹⁰. Given the numeracy and literacy which Islam endowed its early agents with, they became great assets to the rulers of the Hausa states. The clerics not only gave wise counsel to the Emirs on Islamic method of governance but also chronicled the activities of the latter. Gradually, most of the emirs were converted to Islam hence it came to be regarded “as the state’s religion and mode of governance”¹¹.

For centuries, Islam remained an elite religion with adherents drawn mainly from the merchant class and the feudal lords. In the apt words of Hunwick, “until the turn of the 16th century, Islam was chiefly associated with the great urban centres ... and was mainly the religion of the foreign traders and of the ruling class”¹². With many more people embracing the new faith, there developed a community of Muslims drawn from diverse ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. The Uthman Dan Fodio jihad of 1804 not only deepened the practice of Islam but also expanded its frontiers. Quite understandably, Islam made serious inroads into Yorubaland through Ilorin after the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire. It needs to be pointed out that in the spirit of the jihad, Islam was foisted on the Yoruba through coercion thereby forging a somewhat sectarian unity between and among its adherents from the two ethnic divides. This was because every Muslim was considered a brother by his fellow Muslim irrespective of ethnic background or culture.

The emirate system of administration that was established following the jihad was

both innovative and revolutionary. In the emirates, Islamic laws – *Sharia* was applied and *qadi* (judges) were appointed to adjudicate cases and dispense justice. Although this legal system did not meet the British standards; it, all the same, provided a framework for the British rule in the 20th century. The emirs also hired the services of Muslim clerics to help fashion out the system of governance. Indeed, it was through this way that Islam provided the platform upon which Indirect Rule was grafted in Northern Nigeria.

Islam and Nigeria Project under Colonial Rule

One of the greatest bequests of Islam to colonial rule was the large Islamic political system in the northern part of Nigeria. Even after the collapse of both the Kanem Borno Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate, the two citadels of Islam, following the British conquest in the opening years of the 20th century, the Yoruba as well as Igala Muslims still regarded themselves as part of the North politically and were treated as such by Nigerians. There is an argument that “...Islam as a creed served as a fulcrum for uniting the various people that it had converted in a way that transcended the ethnocentric confines of the pre-Islamic relations in these diverse polities”¹³. In order to curry favour and support from the Muslim leaders of the North, the colonial officials not only allowed this seeming unity but also went further to protect the interests of Islam. One way this was done was “through policies which enhanced the status of Islam and its agents”¹⁴.

To bolster the status of Islam, the colonial officials retained and reinvigorated the political structures brought about by it. In some places, alien Muslim chiefs or Emirs were foisted on people outside the confines of the Sokoto Caliphate in the course of the implementation of Indirect Rule. For instance, in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria such as Adamawa, Yola, Hong, Muri etc where the Fulani jihadists were vehemently resisted, the colonial officials confirmed Muslim Emirs on them. Even in Igboland where Islam has a

very weak presence, the British colonial officials attempted to promote the status and rating of Islam through the appointment of Muslims as chiefs. In this way, Chief Ibrahim Adukwu, “an ambitious and powerful Nupe”¹⁵ and Momoh Oshiaba were invested with power and authority over Enugu Ezike and Ovoko, respectively. Further to this, even non-Muslim rulers like Aliyu Obaje (the late Attah Igala) was made to renounce his catholic faith for Islam¹⁶.

There is hardly any doubt that all these subtle conversions made Islam a cohesive element that bound the North together for the eventual takeover of the leadership of Nigeria. The creation of three regions in Nigeria with the North far larger in landmass and numerical strength than the East and the West joined together was to further consolidate the role Islam was to play in Nigeria. The separation of the North from the South through the policy of *divide et imperium* in order to safeguard the interests of Islam did not seem to augur well for national integration. According to M. Tenuche, “this was in order to maximize the benefits of colonial adventure and perhaps, lay a precarious foundation for nation building”¹⁷.

There is a striking clarity that the creation of *Sabon Gari* (Strangers Quarters) was to all intents and purposes to preserve Islam from ‘corrosive’ Western influence associated with non-Muslims from the South. This was one way Islam hindered smooth integration of Nigerians and reflects the negative influence of the religion on the march towards a common nationhood. In the words of Kukah, “historically, the Sabon Gari system was meant to serve as reserves for non-Muslims whom the Muslim ruling class feared would contaminate the purity of Islamic culture if contacts were allowed between non-Muslims for whom they had contempt and their Muslim constituency”¹⁸. On the strength of this, the assertion that “the religion (Islam) advocates peaceful religious co-existence and mutual understanding among the adherents of different religions in order to establish peace

and harmony on earth”¹⁹ does not seem to be borne out by facts.

The Willink Commission set up in 1957 to look into the feasibility of detaching the non-Muslim minority groups from the Hausa-Fulani ruling class failed to address the issue. The Commission, rather argued, among other things that “it had satisfied itself that the grievances of the non-Muslims would be dealt with only within a united North”²⁰. It seems that the Commission only toed the line of thought of the leaders of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). As J.S. Coleman puts it, “the leaders of the NPC have repeatedly and emphatically rejected any suggestion either to alter the present northern boundaries in order to assuage aggrieved minorities or to create new states in the north”²¹. The recommendation, as was to be expected, was soon to tear the thin threads of unity weakly woven around the people of the North. The Tiv revolts – *Nande Nande* (Burning), and *Atem tyough* (Head Breakers) - can be said to be products of frustrated ambitions as well as rejection of Islam and the Hausa-Fulani hegemonic rule.

To Muslims, Islam and politics are synonymous and inseparable. In the words of Sheikh Ibrahim Khalil: The *ulama* (community of Islamic scholars) generally view Islam and politics as inseparable. Islam as a complete way of life is concerned with regulating all human activities, politics inclusive... the majority of the *ulama* see the relationship between politics and Islam as inseparable and Islam and democracy as compatible²²

This nexus appears to explain why the NPC was regarded as the mouthpiece of Islam so much so that any opposition party members were treated as infidels. This is corroborated by one Mallam Maude Gyani, an ardent NPC member, when he said that “NPC is the party that speaks in the name of Allah... We declared for the NPC in the name of Allah. I declared for the NPC in 1960, I raised my dignity and thereby the dignity of my

people”²³. It is reasonable to surmise that Islam was used in this context as a tool for political mobilization. Given the involvement of the NPC in the decolonization process, it stands to reason that Islam made an enormous contribution towards building the Nigerian nation state.

On the other hand, a party like the NPC, organised along a religious fault line in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria, certainly lacked the synch for laying a solid foundation for an indivisible nation. The non-separation of the Mosque from the state has, to a large extent, negatively affected Nigerian’s march towards integration and a common nationhood. For instance, in his rabid opposition to forging unity between the North and the South, “the Sultan added that those southerners who desired a united Nigeria should embrace the religion of the prophet”²⁴. Undoubtedly, Islam which should have been an indispensable tool for national integration/cohesion by bringing out the best in individuals in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society like Nigeria has become a factor of mal-integration and division. The Sultan’s assertion was probably to bolster his hegemony or expand the frontiers of Islam or both at the expense of the nation. M.H. Kukah appears correct when he contended that “the interests of the ruling class in using religion to purchase legitimacy had become a serious threat to regional/national integration as religious politics threatened the stability of the entire polity”²⁵.

The Changing Role of Islam in Post-colonial Nigeria

In a way, Islam held up the march towards Nigeria’s independence. Because it shielded the North from Western education and imbued her with shortage of skilled manpower, the two Southern Regions with greater education were granted self government in 1957, three long years before independence in 1960. On this, M. Crowther has observed that “it might have seemed in 1957 that Nigeria was nearly ready for

independence. The North had however refused to be rushed into independence on the grounds that Northern cadres were not ready to take over the Region’s administration”²⁶. It is instructive to note that since Nigeria’s independence, her political structure has been dominated by Muslims. For instance, since the attainment of independence in 1960- a period of 55 years – Muslims have ruled the country for 30 years leaving Christians with the remaining 25.

It is not surprising that the Northern agenda since then has been to dominate and maintain exclusive control of all the arms of government, including the nation’s wealth and armed forces²⁷. A close look at the scenario would reveal that Islam has not only succeeded in integrating the North into a powerful political bloc but has also thrown up Muslims as the political leaders of Nigeria. The 1979 general elections were erroneously regarded by some northern Muslims as a contest between Muslims and *arna* (unbelievers) who should not be voted for. The fact that Shehu Shagari’s ancestry was traced to the Sardauna of Sokoto, a scion of the royal house of Sokoto, was enough assurance to the Muslims that if voted in power he would protect the interest of Islam.

With the coup d’état of 1983 and the suspension of the constitution that had decreed secularism for the Nigerian State, Islam seemed to have continued to enjoy an overt boost under the military. This is because the military regimes of Muhammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida (both Muslims) were believed to have tinkered with the idea of expanding the frontiers of Islam through their policies and programmes. While the former applied the punitive law copied from Muslim theocratic states of the Middle East in dealing with drug peddlers, the latter dragged Nigeria into the membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC)²⁸. Some other policies of the Babangida regime would appear to have conduced to Islamizing Nigeria. Apart from Nigeria’s membership of the OIC, his cabinet reshuffle of 29 December,

1989 and the creation of Jos North Local Government Area in 1991 were all done to promote Islam at the expense of national cohesion.

On the cabinet reshuffle, R.T. Akinyele writes, among other things, that “the major complaint was that only 6 of the 26 appointees were from the South and three of them were Christian. The unitary command structure of the military accentuated the lopsidedness of the distribution of the important political and military posts such an extent that the army was now regarded as the military wing of the Sokoto Caliphate”²⁹. As was to be expected, “the complaint of the Christians was that out of the 39 new appointees, 26 were Muslims... (and) all the powerful ministries went to the Muslims while emasculated ministries were assigned to Christians”³⁰. Although the two sources gave different figures of the appointees, the issue at stake was that the government was biased against other faiths in the appointments and distribution of portfolios. A case in point was the removal of Domkat Bali from the Defence Ministry to that of Internal Affairs which was further alleged to be gradual “Islamization” of the country by the Babangida regime³¹. It seems clear from the foregoing that the policies and actions of the military were geared towards promoting the interests of Islam over and above those of the nation state. In other words, the leadership saw Islam as its primary constituency and Nigeria second.

The New Face of Islam in a Democratic Setting

The restoration of democracy in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 would appear to have opened a vista for Islam in Nigeria’s political history. Within a year the contentious Sharia’s legal system was introduced by Ahmed Sani Yerima, the then Governor of Zamfara State. As H. Wakili puts it, “In 2000, Zamfara State Government introduced judicial reforms expanding the jurisdiction of *Sharia*, thereby starting a wave that other state governments had to follow”³². The import of this action was

not just that some other governors in the North followed in Yerima’s foot-steps but because it also added a clearly new dimension to the divisive tendencies of Islam. This was a case of one nation, two legal codes which portended danger for the administration of justice. What is more, “with this development therefore, the Sharia legal system would seem to be placed over and above the Nigerian constitution which emphasizes the secularity of Nigeria”³³.

The implementation of the Sharia legal code in such States as Bauchi, Yobe, Kano, Jigawa, etc occasioned unprecedented crises which left many people dead. D. Abubakar has perceptively observed that “the continuous introduction of the Sharia legal system by Northern States such as Kano, coupled with its highly cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic as well as multi-religious demography suggests, in a deeper way, the magnitude of the dilemmas of Nigeria’s national unity project”³⁴. The introduction of Sharia here can be said to have sufficiently unsettled the age-long spirit of oneness and common nationhood. It is hardly open to doubt that Islam, rather than patriotism, prompted some Muslim clerics into making statements that fuelled crises. The idea of some members of an Islamic sect known as *Jama'iatul Tajdid Islammiya* (JTI) forcing non-indigenes and non-Muslims out of the metropolitan city of Kano³⁵ represented everything wrong in a secular society.

It seems likely that the Governors that implemented the Sharia legal system wanted to curry favour and support from the Muslim populace. This view is corroborated by Sanusi L. Sanusi when he observed that “the mass support enjoyed by the sharia debate among Muslims in the early period after 1999 resulted from the perceived loss of power by the North...”³⁶. Given the above, it is logical to argue that Islam was used as a tool for political bargaining and legitimacy. Ali Mazrui would seem to be reacting to the situation in Northern Nigeria when he observed that “when religion is held very seriously by a society, it affects the state and

the polity³⁷. These State Governors were likely to have been driven by Islamic ideals in their actions rather than national considerations. Indeed, it is believed that “the practice of democracy is not un-Islamic and that democracy could be used to advance and defend the interests of Muslims in a secular state³⁸”.

In Islam, politics and religion are Siamese twins. Ahead of the 2007 general elections, Muslims were urged to vote for leaders that would protect their interests. As it were, “all the three major political parties-the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), (the) All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and (the) Action Congress (AC)- fielded Northern Muslim candidates and Southern Christian running mates, respectively³⁹ for the presidential elections. This development was re-assuring for the Muslims, especially clerics like Abubakar Gumi whose attitude towards non-Muslims was essentially that of distrust and apprehension. This attitude was at the bottom line of Gumi’s inflammatory statement that “...if Christians do not accept Muslims as their leader, we have to divide the country...once you are a Muslim, you can not accept to choose a non-Muslim to be your leader⁴⁰”. Quite understandably, such a statement was capable of engendering fears, anxieties and disaffection amongst the citizens of Nigeria. The 2011 post-electoral paroxysm of violence and crises in some cities of Northern Nigeria was likely to be the fallouts of such a statement.

In recent years, the tempo and intensity of Islam-induced violence against the state has increased tremendously. As Uche Nwankwo has posited, “since the enthronement in 1999 of General Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of Nigeria, there has been a steady drumbeat of violence against Christians by Hausa-Fulani Moslems(sic) in Northern Nigeria⁴¹”. There is now a new face of Islam quite distinct from what it used to be. This is to be found in Boko Haram, otherwise known as *Jamaatu Alhlissunnah Liddas awatiwal Jihad*, a sect that rejects and condemns

everything Western. In furtherance of the sect’s belief, its members “stated that Islam permits them to subsist under a modern government like Nigeria but has explicitly prohibited them from joining or supporting such government in so far as their (sic) systems, structures and institutions contains(sic) elements contradictory to core Islamic principles and beliefs⁴²”. This injunction, it is interesting to observe, contravenes that of the *Qur’an* which enjoins Muslims to be obedient to a lawfully constituted authority. In the words of the *Qur’an* “O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey his messenger and those who are in authority among you⁴³”.

At the initial stage, the Boko Haram sect embarked on spiral attacks on Christian targeting mostly people of Igbo extraction”. The South East caucus in the House of Representatives through its Chairman Ogbuefi Ozongbachi has noted among other things that: For instance, there were bomb blasts in worship places on December 25, 2011 at Madalla Niger State and April 8, 2012 at Kaduna on Christmas and on Easter; two of the holiest days in the Christian calendar, respectively. From there, the spate of the attacks spread to other states, especially Kano, Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Yobe and Borno. In the wake of these vicious attacks, what “the sect gets from the region’s indulgent elite is a mild rebuke, more out of a public relations consideration and appeasement of the South than a determined effort to deter a senseless agitation⁴⁵”.

The Boko Haram activities which are supposedly intended to protect and defend the interests of Islam would seem to contradict Prophet Muhammad’s teachings on *dhimmiyin* (non-Muslims). As some experts in the *Qur’an* have observed, any harm against a non-Muslim who keeps a peace treaty with Muslims is a sin against Allah and is therefore condemnable⁴⁶. In the Nigerian context, the Boko Haram sect’s activities were un-Islamic just as they were antithetical to the Nigerian project.

The Northeastern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe have been under siege and on emergency rule following the violent attacks unleashed on them by the sect in the name of Islam. The high point of the vicious attacks that have either sacked villages and towns, displaced or killed Nigerians (some of whom are Muslims) is the excision of some towns such as 'Gwoza Caliphate' and Sambissa (all in Borno State) from Nigeria. According to Philip Tachin, "when violence, whether provoked or unprovoked, becomes a dominant practical symbol of a religion, then its claim of peace becomes suspect since it cannot categorically separate itself from such violence"⁴⁷. With all these atrocities against Nigeria and her citizens, there seems to be no doubt that Islam, in whatever disguise, has an undisclosed agenda to wreck the fabric of the nation. It is rather an irony that Borno State - a part of the Old Kanem Borno which provided the artery to Islam into Nigeria is also a citadel from where the sect has been carrying out its gory disintegrative insurgency.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This study is but a glimpse and therefore does not pretend to have said the last thing about Islam's negative role in nation building. Furthermore, it has concerned itself with the Nigerian Question thereby leaving a gap in other aspects of the history of Islam in Nigeria. This makes it imperative for future researchers to look in other areas of the history of the religion.

CONCLUSION

Islam and its contributions to the Nigerian Question have been evaluated from the utterances, actions and activities of Muslims. What Islam as a religion has been able to do is to unite a section of Nigeria against the rest; a development that is at variance with the unity and indivisibility of the Nigerian nation. Rather than building a

formidable nation-state founded on freedom, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations, Islam, through spurious sects, has visited Nigeria with fire and brimstone. For instance, the Boko Haram phenomenon "makes it impossible for...(Nigerians) to realise full and inclusive citizenship of their place of domicile"⁴⁸. The activities of the sect suggest that Islam is not at peace with itself, since the sect attacks Muslims and non-Muslims in the name of religion.

The introduction of the Sharia legal system in some states in the North has, not only created a nation with two legal codes, but also produced a 'divided-self' among the citizens. The distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims has generated an uneasy relationship and crises between brothers. Islam, as practiced in some Northern states unlike what obtains in the West, does not engender accommodation, co-operation and a cultivated willingness to live side by side with other faiths. Since it does not encourage horizontal interaction among Nigerians, Islam has become foundational to the forces of disintegration. Rather than address the Nigerian Question, Islam has undeniably become part of it. The claim by Abdullahi Mahadi that "there were inter-marriages and the attendant effects of assimilation and integration between the different ethnic-groups"⁴⁹ should be treated with utmost caution.

On the economic plane, the negative effects of Islamic activities with focus on the paroxysm of violence and crises certainly outweigh the positive side. These crises have made states affected unfriendly to investment; thereby ruining individual and corporate economic activities there. It has been noted that the national economic wellbeing is intricately intertwined with that of the individual citizens and the federating units. The claim that Islam and peace are synonymous has been contradicted by its adherents through violent destruction of lives and properties. Undoubtedly, Islam can be

said to constitute the greatest threat to the continued corporate existence of Nigeria.

Although religion and economy belong to different spheres, the latter has been at the bottom line of most of the religious crises witnessed in Nigeria. The poor governance of the country has imbued some Muslim fanatics especially the Boko Haram insurgents with the psychology of frustration and -aggression which translate to violent religious attacks on the nation and its citizens in the name of Islam. What is needed to contain such vicious and disintegrative activities of the fanatics is for the state to redefine its role in terms of ensuring good governance, and maintaining law and order in the land. The issue of religion is central to the life of every Nigerian. In the same way, "religion has been an important factor in Nigerian's national life"⁵⁰. Because of the way Islam has been turned into a

religion of terror, the Nigerian nation-state ought to have set up inter-religious organisations at the three tiers of government with the mandate to regulate the activities of the different faiths. Such inter-face organisations can be a valuable asset to the nation in its quest to nip in the bud, any act of religious extremism that may snowball into conflagration. In a democracy, dialogue should take the centre-stage of every national issue with religious dialogue as a panacea for the intermittent bloody skirmishes. In this way, the endemic religious disturbances would be brought under strong national leash. The two major religious groups – Islam and Christianity can then build bridges of understanding and co-operation between their adherents in the interest of national unity.

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